PETRELS NIGHT AND DAY: A SOUND APPROACH GUIDE

Robb, M., Mullarney, K. & The Sound Approach. 2008. Dorset, UK: The Sound Approach. 300 pp., 18 plates, numerous photographs, sonograms and maps. Includes 2 CDs. Hard cover. ISBN-13: 9789081093323. £35/$70.

Significant books on petrels such as this one are unfortunately few and far between. The book covers various petrels found in the eastern North Atlantic, with a combination of anecdotal accounts by the senior author Magnus Robb (who also made and analysed the sound recordings), detailed field guide–type illustrations by artist Killian Mullarney, and the calls of these seabirds produced by "Sound Approach" on two compact discs. The calls cover most of the species and subspecies mentioned in the text and are not simply short edited sequences, but long real-time recordings. Although the book is in A4 landscape format and a bit awkward to handle, it suits the many superb photos of petrels and shearwaters in their breeding colonies and at sea. Petrels are essentially a horizontal species!
Artwork by Mullarney enhances the text and sea-watchers in particular will find the plates and photos very useful.

The geographic area covered, with one exception, ranges from Iceland in the north to the Cape Verde Islands in the south and includes the Mediterranean islands. Evocative sound recordings of the cackles, squeaks, barks and asthmatic screams of Procellariiformes from these areas bring back vivid memories for those of us fortunate enough to have visited many of these locations. The chapters are thorough and up to date, and deal mostly with breeding birds, with the odd exception where appropriate—for example, Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus,* Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis* and Wilson's Storm-Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus,* all from southern oceans.

A large amount of new data is revealed within these pages, which include acceptance of a fair amount of taxonomic revision. Is this the place for such hypotheses? I find that many taxonomic revelations based purely on DNA evidence are rarely independently verified. Such major changes should therefore be conducted through the pages of scientific journals rather than in a non-peer-reviewed commercial publication. Having said that, most of the "splits" mentioned have already been published (but some have not). We have here *Oceanodroma castro* divided into several new putative species and the associated vernacular naming. While the late Luis Monteiro deserves his name bestowed on one of the "hot & cold" breeding-season species that he discovered during his studies on the Azores, ad hoc naming of another is not the prerogative of the book's authors, but of the discoverer and authority of the new species (Bolton *et al.* 2008). Edward Vernon Harcourt, who first described *O. castro* in 1851 has also lost out somewhere, because Harcourt's Storm-Petrel was, after all, the vernacular name for the species before it was given the rather inappropriate Madeiran or Band-rumped Storm-Petrel. Molecular examination of type specimens is surely required. Large and small *O. castro* breeding on São Tomé were first revealed by Mike Harris (Harris 1969), and perhaps he too should get some recognition, although the birds there may also prove to be unique?

There is also the "problem" of *Puffinus* shearwaters breeding on Menorca. Are they *mauretanicus* or *yelkouan*? Or are they a hybrid swarm also requiring a new name? Look at their photos, listen to their sounds and judge for yourself.

Missing from the geographic area covered are petrels such as Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax* (recorded from Italy) and some recent sightings and photographic records from the Azores of Kermadec Petrel *Pterodroma neglecta* (and an old specimen record from the United Kingdom). The Azores Cahow *Pterodroma cahow,* present in these islands for at least four years, is also briefly mentioned. Not considered are the often host-specific feather lice (*Phthiraptera*) and their significance in petrel relationships. But these points do not detract in any way from the thrust of this book. Indeed, they could hopefully be included in a second volume.

The discovery of Swinhoe's Storm-Petrel *Oceanodroma monorhis* in the eastern North Atlantic is carefully documented, and we learn that one banded bird (the first), among others since caught, has been present on the Selvagem Islands for 25 years. This raises the thought that all the other captures to date (about 16) of this species in the eastern North Atlantic and Mediterranean could be offspring from perhaps a single breeding pair. To include Swinhoe's Storm-Petrel in the account, recordings and other data collected in South Korea are presented in the book.

A fair amount of space is taken up with sonograms and their interpretation. The actual calls can be played, alongside their individual graphic representations, making them easy to understand. However, experience with British Storm-Petrels *Hydrobates pelagicus* makes me somewhat sceptical of the interpretation that can be placed onto some of the subtleties mentioned. "Stormies" can be mist-netted using the calls of Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* set 100 m inland or simply by flicking the stations on a transistor radio (pers. obs.). They are equally attracted to totally different calls of other Procellariiformes. What does it all mean? Are the call subtleties of petrels really isolating mechanisms or simply local dialects?

Magnus Robb has an enthusiasm for petrels to which I can easily relate and which will hopefully inspire a new generation. Like others, and I, he has perhaps subconsciously followed in the footsteps of the late R.M. Lockley, whose writings and wanderings inspired many young petrel and seabird people. *Petrels Night and Day* sheds new light on these Procellariiformes. Petrels are amazing birds, be they at sea or in their colony. A night on the mountains of Madeira listening to Zino's Petrels *Pterodroma madeira,* is something ethereal and never to be forgotten. This book and those calls bring it back instantly. In this case, the vernacular name is well deserved, because without the late Alec Zino's efforts, the species would most probably now be extinct. His "story" with the petrels is duly recounted.

This fine textbook combines interesting, almost amazing, revelations on petrels with the actual calls of the birds under scrutiny. It is also reasonably priced. Anyone remotely interested in petrels should, and probably will, add this very useful book to their library. If they don't, they are missing something special.

REFERENCES

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